



SPECIAL EDITION--JULY 2014

Summer prompts reminder of rabies control requirements in Wisconsin

By Dr. Yvonne Bellay, Wisconsin Rabies Control Program Manager

Now that winter is finally over, people and animals alike are out enjoying the warm weather, which means an increase in the number of people to animal and animal to animal contacts. Consequently, it's the time of the year when we receive a sizable influx of questions about rabies or the state's rabies control program. Due to the significant public health and animal health issues surrounding rabies, a number of recurring questions or issues arise that I will address here. Generally speaking, the requirements can be found in Section 95.21 of the Wisconsin Statutes.

- **Dog Rabies Vaccination Requirements.** Wisconsin law requires that all dogs 5 months and older be vaccinated against rabies. This requirement coincides with the requirement that all dogs 5 months and older be licensed (rabies vaccination is a requirement of licensing). Rabies vaccines are approved for use at 3 months of age. Consequently, dogs may be vaccinated at 3 months and must be vaccinated by 5 months of age. For more information, see [95.21\(2\)](#).
- **Cat Rabies Vaccination Requirements.** Although by state law only dogs are required to be vaccinated against rabies, many municipalities require cats to be vaccinated. Veterinarians should be aware of local ordinance requirements. Whether or not required by law, cat owners should be encouraged to have all cats (including indoor only cats) kept current on rabies vaccinations. Not vaccinating indoor only cats doesn't take into account that "stuff happens", i.e. cat catches a bat in the house, cat escaping through open windows and doors, cat biting a person, etc. In addition, consistently more rabid cats are reported than dogs in the US, and cats accounted for most of the rabid domestic animals reported to CDC in 2012.
- **Rabies Vaccination of Other Species.** Rabies vaccines are licensed for use in dogs, cats, ferrets, horses, cattle, and sheep. As previously discussed, Wisconsin state law only requires rabies vaccination of dogs. However, the American Association of Equine Practitioners recommends rabies vaccination as one of the core vaccines administered to horses. Also, because of their close contact with people, vaccination is recommended for pet ferrets and may be required by local ordinance. In addition, the owners of valuable cattle or sheep are encouraged to vaccinate those animals against rabies.
- **Rabies Vaccine Administration.** In order to be recognized as valid, Wisconsin law requires rabies vaccine administered to dogs be administered only by a licensed veterinarian or licensed veterinary technician under the direct supervision of a veterinarian. The veterinarian or veterinary technician who administers the vaccine must then issue (sign) the rabies certificate to the owner. For purposes of rabies control, rabies vaccines administered to other species for which there is an approved vaccine are also only

considered valid if administered by a licensed veterinarian or licensed veterinary technician under the direct supervision of a veterinarian. For more information, see [95.21\(2\)\(b\)](#).

- **Bite Quarantine Periods.** In all cases of bites to humans from dogs, cats, and ferrets, the quarantine period is 10 days (ferrets are not currently addressed specifically in the law, but are treated exactly as dogs and cats through accepted public health policy). The 10 day period is always counted from the date of the bite. The 10 day period does not apply to bites from livestock species, and these situations are dealt with on a case by case basis. The 10 day period also does not apply to bites from wildlife, and in these situations the biting animal should be euthanized and submitted for rabies testing. Dogs, cats, and ferrets current on rabies vaccination may be quarantined at home but must be presented for 3 veterinary exams (day 1, day 10 and one intervening day). Dogs, cats, and ferrets not current on rabies vaccination at the time of the bite must be confined at an “isolation facility”. For more information, see [95.21\(5\)\(a\)](#) , [95.21\(5\)\(b\)](#)
- **Animal Exposure Quarantine Periods.** Domestic animals known or suspected of being exposed to a known or suspected rabid animal (e.g. dog tangles with skunk, cat kills bat) must be quarantined on the owner’s premises for either 60 or 180 days. If current on its rabies vaccination the exposed animal must be quarantined for 60 days, however, if the exposed animal is not current on its rabies vaccination at the time of the exposure it must be quarantined for 180 days. For more information, see [95.21\(5\)\(c\)](#).
- **Issuance of quarantines.** Quarantines for rabies control are issued by the “officer” responsible for such enforcement within the jurisdiction. Veterinary practitioners have no authority to issue them. For more information, see [95.21\(1\)\(b\)](#)
- **Rabies Testing Fees.** By long-standing policy, in cases of both human and animal exposure the rabies specimen testing typically is fee exempt.
- **Release of Rabies Vaccination Information.** Due to the public health concerns, veterinarians are expected to comply with requests from local officials for rabies vaccination information on animals involved in rabies control investigations. For more information, see [95.21\(7\)](#) , [VE 7.06\(26\)](#).
- **Veterinary Clinics as Isolation Facilities.** Generally, veterinary clinics meet the definition of an “isolation facility” very well and are often used by local authorities for this purpose. However, a private practice veterinarian is not required to hold unvaccinated dogs, cats, or ferrets that bite people in isolation, or to do so without compensation, for a jurisdiction if he/she does not wish to do so. Veterinarians are expected to cooperate with local authorities in rabies control, and should discuss with local authorities what they are able to do to assist in a professional capacity. For more information, see [95.21\(1\)\(am\)](#) and [95.21\(7\)](#).
- **Bite Incident Reporting.** State law does not require the reporting of animal bites to people. However, veterinarians should be aware of local ordinance requirements which may address such reporting. Although reporting may not be required by law, veterinarians should keep in mind that quarantine of the biting animal and appropriate medical management of the bitten person may not be possible if an incident is not reported.

Rabies in Wisconsin: A Historical Perspective

Rabies in Wisconsin, as well as the US and developed world, is a disease of wildlife. In Wisconsin, our wildlife vectors are the skunk and the bat, and cases in domestic animals are considered “spillover” cases from these vectors. Due to population fluctuations and other factors, the number of reported cases varies by year. For example, in Wisconsin in 1981 the number of reported rabies cases was 13 bats, 9 fox, 1 groundhog, 236 skunks, 1 woodchuck, 15 cats, 35 cows, 14 dogs, 7 horses, 1 sheep, totaling 332 reported cases. In 1991, the numbers

reported were 7 bats, 48 skunks, 1 fox, 7 dogs, 3 cats, and 9 cows, for a total of 75 cases. In 2013, 30 bats were the only cases reported.

However, although determined to be eliminated from the US, in the underdeveloped nations the canine strain of rabies is the predominant strain.

Although human rabies cases are considered rare in the US (average 2/year), according to the World Health Organization an estimated 55,000 thousand people worldwide die each year of rabies (1 person every 10 minutes). Unfortunately, once the signs of rabies are exhibited, death is considered inevitable.

Since the 1900's, the number of human deaths for rabies in the US has decreased from 100 or more per year to 2 to 3 per year. (Wisconsin's human cases were reported in 1959, 2000, 2004, 2010) There are two main reasons for this decline.

1. Animal control and vaccination programs begun in the 1940's, along with oral vaccination programs begun in the 2000's have eliminated the domestic dog as a reservoir.
2. Better health care and the development of human rabies vaccines and immunoglobulins, providing effective post exposure prophylaxis.

Rabies resources available at datcp.wi.gov

Additional information about rabies is available at datcp.wi.gov. There you will find a variety of resources to help you better understand rabies, its transmission and prevention methods for people of all ages. We have developed brochures, coloring books, and maps to help you explain rabies to your patients in an easy-to-understand format. You can find these resources at datcp.wi.gov.

If you have questions about rabies that are not answered here, please contact Dr. Yvonne Bellay at 608-224-4888 or e-mail her at yvonne.bellay@wi.gov.